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ELECTRICAL EVAPORATION.¹

It is well known that when a vacuum tube is furnished with internal platinum electrodes, the adjacent glass, especially near the negative pole, speedily becomes blackened, owing to the deposition of metallic platinum. The passage of the induction current greatly stimulates the motion of the residual gaseous molecules; those condensed upon and in the immediate neighborhood of the negative pole are shot away at an immense speed in almost straight lines, the speed varying with the degree of exhaustion and with the intensity of the induced current. Platinum being used for the negative pole, not only are the gaseous molecules shot away from the electrode, but the passage of the current so affects the normal molecular motions of the metal as to remove some of the molecules from the sphere of attraction of the mass, causing them to fly off with the stream of gaseous molecules proceeding from the negative pole, and to adhere to any object near it. This property was, I believe, first pointed out by Dr. Wright of Yale College, and some interesting experiments are described by him in the *American Journal of Science and Art* (Third Series, xii. 49, xiv. 169). The process has been much used for the production of small mirrors for physical apparatus.

This electrical volatilization or evaporation is very similar to ordinary evaporation by the agency of heat. Cohesion in solids varies according to physical and chemical constitution; thus every kind of solid matter requires to be raised to a certain temperature before the molecules lose their fixity of position and are rendered liquid, a result which is reached at widely different temperatures. If we consider a liquid at atmospheric pressure,—say, for instance, a basin of water in an open room,—at molecular distances the boundary surface between the liquid and the superincumbent gas will not be a plane, but turbulent like a stormy ocean. The molecules at the surface of the liquid dart to and fro, rebound

from their neighbors, and fly off in every direction. Their initial velocity may be either accelerated or retarded, according to the direction of impact. The result of a collision may drive a molecule in such a direction that it remains part and parcel of the liquid; on the other hand, it may be sent upwards without any diminution of speed, and it will then be carried beyond the range of attraction of neighboring molecules, and fly off into and mingle with the superincumbent gas. If a molecule of the liquid has been driven at an angle with a velocity not sufficient to carry it beyond the range of molecular attraction of the liquid, it may still escape, since, in its excursion upwards, a gaseous molecule may strike it in the right direction, and its temporary visit may be converted into permanent residence.

The intrinsic velocity of the molecules is intensified by heat and diminished by cold. If, therefore, we raise the temperature of the water without materially increasing that of the surrounding air, the excursions of the molecules of the liquid are rendered longer and the force of impact greater, and thus the escape of molecules into the upper region of gas is increased, and we say that evaporation is augmented.

If the initial velocities of the liquid molecules can be increased by any other means than by raising the temperature, so that their escape into the gas is rendered more rapid, the result may be called "evaporation" just as well as if heat had been applied.

Hitherto I have spoken of a liquid evaporating into a gas; but the same reasoning applies equally to a solid body. But whilst a solid body like platinum requires an intense heat to enable its upper stratum of molecules to pass beyond the sphere of attraction of the neighboring molecules, experiment shows that a very moderate amount of negative electrification super-adds sufficient energy to enable the upper stratum of metallic molecules to fly beyond the attractive power of the rest of the metal.

If a gaseous medium exists above the liquid or solid, it prevents to some degree the molecules from flying off. Thus both ordinary and electrical evaporation are more rapid in a vacuum than at the ordinary atmospheric pressure.

I have recently made some experiments upon the evaporation of different subjects under the electric stress.

Evaporation of Cadmium.—A U-shaped tube was made, having a bulb in each limb. The platinum poles were at the extremities of each limb, and in each bulb was suspended from a small platinum hook a small lump of cadmium, the metal having been cast on to the wire. The wires were each weighed with and without the cadmium. The tube was exhausted, and the lower half of the tube was inclosed in a metal pot containing paraffine wax, the temperature being kept at 230° C. during the continuance of the experiment. A deposit around the negative pole took place almost immediately, and in five minutes the bulb surrounding it was opaque with deposited metal. The positive pole with its surrounding luminosity could be easily seen the whole time. In thirty minutes the experiment was stopped, and after all was cold the tube was opened and the wires weighed again. The results were as follows:—

	Positive pole.	Negative pole.
Original weight of cadmium.....	9.34 grains.	9.38 grains.
Weight after experiment.....	9.25 "	1.86 "
Cadmium volatilized in 30 minutes.....	0.09 "	7.52 "

Finding that cadmium volatilized so readily under the action of the induction current, a large quantity, about 350 grains, of the pure metal was sealed up in a tube, and the end of the tube containing the metal was heated to a little

¹ Abstract of a paper read by Professor William Crookes, F.R.S., before the Royal Society, London, on June 11; from *Nature* of July 2.